



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

News Release

Office of Public Affairs
Media Relations

Washington, DC 20420
(202) 461-7600
www.va.gov

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
July 3, 2019

VA overhauls religious and spiritual symbol policies to protect religious liberty

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) recently revised its directives permitting religious literature, symbols and displays at VA facilities to protect religious liberty for Veterans and families while ensuring inclusivity and nondiscrimination.

The move aims to simplify and clarify the department's policies governing [religious symbols](#), and [spiritual and pastoral care](#), which have been interpreted inconsistently at various VA facilities in recent years, resulting in [unfortunate incidents](#) that interrupted certain [displays](#).

Effective July 3, these changes will help ensure that patrons within VA have access to religious literature and symbols at chapels as requested and protect representations of faith in publicly accessible displays at facilities throughout the department.

"We want to make sure that all of our Veterans and their families feel welcome at VA, no matter their religious beliefs. Protecting religious liberty is a key part of how we accomplish that goal," said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. "These important changes will bring simplicity and clarity to our policies governing religious and spiritual symbols, helping ensure we are consistently complying with the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution at thousands of facilities across the department."

The new policies will:

- Allow the inclusion in appropriate circumstances of religious content in publicly accessible displays at VA facilities.
- Allow patients and their guests to request and be provided religious literature, symbols and sacred texts during visits to VA chapels and during their treatment at VA.
- Allow VA to accept donations of religious literature, cards and symbols at its facilities and distribute them to VA patrons under appropriate circumstances or to a patron who requests them.

The [U.S. Supreme Court](#) recently reaffirmed the important role religion plays in the lives of many Americans and its consistency with Constitutional principles. This includes the following values: a display that follows in the longstanding tradition of monuments, symbols and practices; respect and tolerance of differing views; and endeavors to achieve inclusivity and nondiscrimination.

###